

## First East African nesting record for the Barred Owlet *Glaucidium capense* from Galana, Coast Province, Kenya

The Barred Owlet *Glaucidium capense schlefferi* is uncommon in dense habitat in eastern Kenya (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989), but more widespread throughout central and southern Tanzania (Fry *et al.* 1988). The only breeding records for East Africa concern a bird in breeding condition on Mafia Island (Tanzania) in September (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1952), and adults with three flying young in January 1974 (Matzke & Matzke 1974). Despite its loud calls, and a degree of daytime activity, the species' overall shy and retiring habits probably account for the lack of records.

On 11 December 1991, we followed up a report of a breeding Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus ireneae* (whose nest and eggs are unknown, Brown & Britton 1980) at a site inland from Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Kenya. We drove *c.* 40 km from the village of Jilore towards Tsavo National Park (East), leaving the main Sala Gate road at 28 km and heading towards the Galana River. The actual site lies west of Baricho, but not as far as Chakama, about 3 km from the river at approximately 3°10S, 39°40E.

In an area of mixed bush and newly settled *shamba*, we found a *Cynometra webberi* tree standing as part of a dense thicket hedge bordering a small farm settlement. The tree stood approximately 5 m tall, but had been partially destroyed for fuelwood (several limbs had been removed). The owner assured us he had stopped cutting on finding nesting activity the previous year, and the cuts in the limbs were definitely old.

On inspecting the tree more closely, we flushed a Barred Owlet from a hole. It flew to a neighbouring tree in which we then discovered a second bird at rest in deep shade. Fearing any attempt to climb the tree would damage it further, we set up a step ladder alongside, and managed to see into the nest from above. With the aid of a torch we were able to see two rather oval white or white-grey eggs resting on a floor of what looked like dried leaf fragments, including some broken palm frond. The eggs were resting about 1 m below the point where we could see into the nest, and could not be reached for measuring.

After a few minutes, we retreated to watch the owlet re-enter the nest through a hollow side limb stump at 3 m, leading to the floor of the nest chamber at around 2.5 m. It had flushed from a separate bolt hole, and there appeared to be a total of four entrances through which the owlets could reach the hollow tree interior. An inspection of holes at the base of the tree revealed that a lot of plant matter had been used to fill the hole below the nest by the owlets or previous inhabitants. The tree trunk was well covered with climbing plants. Eggs in early December accord well with the other records of breeding condition in September and young flying in January, and confirm the suggestion that egg-laying takes place in November (Brown & Britton 1980).

Although the nearest building was only about 20 m from the nest, the birds did not appear to be alarmed by normal human activity and sat tight unless the tree was approached directly. They also allowed close approach to the tree to which they were flushed, suggesting that they would not desert the area if similar levels of disturbance continued. The *shamba* owner assured us that he would continue to protect the nest.

## References

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*John Fanshawe, Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, Box 40658 Nairobi, Kenya (present address: BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, England) and David Ngala, Gede Forest Station, Box 201 Malindi, Kenya*

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## Notes and new distribution records of the Quail Plover *Ortyxelos meiffreni*

Britton (1980) gives the distribution of the Quail Plover *Ortyxelos meiffreni* in southeastern Kenya as occurring in Tsavo National Park (East) in all months of the year. Urban *et al.* (1986) give a less specific locality, but confirm its regular presence in southeastern Kenya.

Between March and November 1991 Susan Stolberger and I made 27 sightings of this species from three pairs that appeared resident along a 3-km stretch of road near Kitani, in Tsavo National Park (West) at 3°00S, 37°59E. In April the same year I collected a specimen (to be lodged in the National Museum, Nairobi) in breeding condition in the park 15 km northwest of Kitani. We made a further sighting some 20 km southwest of Kitani in September 1991.

On 9 October 1993 SS and I saw a female crossing a road 23 km from Kuro on the road to Loiboseret in the Tarangire National Park, Tanzania at c. 4°S, 36°E.

All the sightings in Tsavo West and the single observation in Tarangire were on red soil where there was *Aristida* grass in acacia woodland. The sighting southwest of Kitani was in *Acacia-Commiphora* thicket, denser than all the other habitats.

We noticed a very characteristic gait during many of our observations. Reminiscent of the hesitant manner in which a chameleon rocks its body forwards and backwards as it progresses, we dubbed it the 'chameleon walk'. On another occasion my eye was caught by movement under a small *Solanum* bush that initially gave the impression of a leaf moving in a slight wind. On looking closer, we saw that it was a Quail Plover, rocking gently as it stood in a particularly effective exhibition of crypsis.

We also observed a Quail Plover dust bathing. Instead of lowering itself gently into the centre of the 'bath', it stood at the edge and threw itself sideways landing on its